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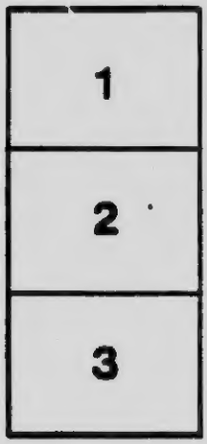


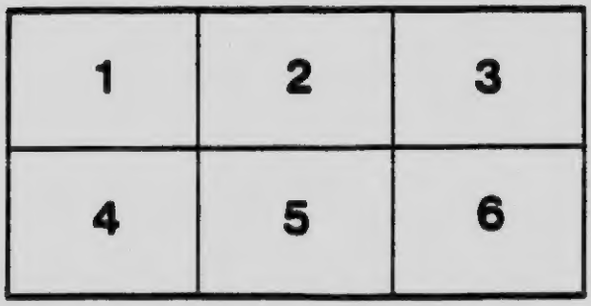

Containing revisions found in
Mrs. Kings copy by B.C.

"Dear Mrs King:

Pray accept a copy of this poem
which your reading has made ac-
ceptable to many people – including
your friend who wrote it."

# THE WORD AT ST. KAVIN'S

C

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BY

BLISS CARMAN

THE MONADNOCK PRESS
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NEW HAMPSHIRE

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1903

# THE WORD AT ST. KAVIN'S

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ONCE at St. Kavin's door
I rested. No sigh more
Of discontent escaped me from that day.
For there I overheard
A Brother of the Word
Expound the grace of poverty, and say:

THANK God for poverty
That makes and keeps us free,
And lets us go our unobtrusive way,
Glad of the sun and rain,
Upright, serene, humane,
Contented with the fortune of a day.

LIGHT-HEARTED as a bird,
I will obey the word
That bade the earth take form, the sea subside,—
That bids the wild wings go
Each year from line to snow,
When Spring unfurls her old green flag for guide,—

THAT bids the fleeting hosts
Along the shelving coasts
Once more adventure far by sound and stream,—
Bids everything alive
Awaken and revive,—
Resume the unperished glory and the dream.

I TOO, with fear put by,
Confront my destiny,
With not a wish but to arise and go,
Where beauty still may lead
From creed to larger creed,
Thanking my Maker that he made me so.

FOR I would shun no task
That kindliness may ask,
Nor flinch at any duty to my kind;
Praying but to be freed
From ignorance and greed,
Gray fear and dull despondency of mind.

SO I would readjust
The logic of the dust,
The servile hope that puts its trust in things;
Ephemera of earth,
Of more than fleeting worth,
Are we, endowed with rapture as with wings.

TYPE of the soul of man,
The slight yet stable plan!
Those creatures perishable as the dew,
How buoyantly they ride
The vast and perilous tide,
Frail shreds of earth the skyey tints enhue!

AND I would keep my soul
Joyous and sane and whole,
Unshamed by falsehood and unvexed by strife,
Unalien in that clear
And radiant atmosphere
That still surrounds us with a larger life,

WHEN we have laid aside [whenever we are free]
Our truculence and pride, [From insincerity]
Craven self-seeking, turbulent self-will, [truculent]
Resolved this very day
No longer to obey
The tyrant Mammon who begods us still.

ALL selfish gain at best
Brings but profound unrest
And inward loss, despite our fine professions.
Think therefore what it is,
What surety of bliss,
To be absolved from burdensome possessions!

SHALL God, who doth provide
The majesty and pride
And beauty of this earth so lavishly,
Deny them to the poor
And lowly and obscure?
Nay, they are given to all justly and free.

AND if I share my crust,
As common manhood must,
With one whose need is greater than my own,
Shall I not also give
His soul, that it may live,
Of the abundant pleasures I have known?

AND so, if I have wrought,
Amassed or conceived aught
Of beauty or intelligence or power,
It is not mine to hoard;
It stands there to afford
Its generous service simply as a flower.

HOW soon, my friends, how soon,
We should obtain the boon
Of shining peace for which the toiler delves,
If only we would give
Our spirit room to live,—
Be, here and now, our brave untarnished selves.

IF only we would dare
Espouse the good and fair
Our soul, unbound by custom, still perceives,
And without compromise
Or favour in men's eyes
Live by the truth each one of us believes.

BOW not to vested wrong
That we have served too long,
Pawning our birthright for a tinsel star!
Shall the soul take upon her
Time-service and mouth-honour?
Behold the fir-trees, how unswerved they are!

NATIVE to sun and storm,
They cringe not nor conform,
Save to the gentle law their sound heart knows;
Each day enough for them
To rise, cone, branch, and stem,
A leaf-breadth higher in their tall repose.

AH, what a travesty
Of man's ascent, were I
To bear myself less royally than they,
After the ages spent
In spirit's betterment,
Through rounds of aspiration and decay!

FOR surely I have grown [I may not]
Within a cleft of stone,
With spray of mountain torrents in my face;
Slow soaring ring by ring
On moveless tilted wing,
I have seen earth below me sink through space.
[I have seen the earth] ?

[41] I TOO in polar night
Have hungered, gaunt and white,
Alone amid the awful silences;
[or] And fled on gaudy fin,
When the blue tides came in,
Through coral gardens under tropic seas.

[42] AND wheresoe'er I strove,
The greater law was love,
A faith too fine to falter or mistrust;
There was no wanton greed,
Depravity of breed,
Malice nor cant nor enmity unjust.

NAY, not till I was man,
Learned I to scheme and plan
The blackest depredation on my kind,
Converting to my gain
My fellow's need and pain,
In chartered pillage ruthless and refined.

THEREFORE, my friends, I say,
Back to the fair sweet way
Our mother Nature taught us long ago,—
The large primeval mood,
Leisure and amplitude,
The dignity of patience strong and slow. [wisdom of the seasons as they go]



Glad industry and zest,
A passion for the best,
Unsullied, unperverted, undismayed,
The pride of life again
The comeliness of men,
With happiness and power undecayed:

LET us go in once more
By some blue mountain door,
And hold communion with the forest leaves;
Where long ago we trod
The Ghost House of the God,
Through orange dawns and amethystine eves!

THERE bright-robed choristers
Make music in the firs,
Rejoicing in their service all day long;
And there the whole night through,
Along the dark still blue,
What glorious hosts with starry tapers throng!

THERE in some deep ravine
Whose walls are living green,
A sanctuary spacious, cool and dim,
At earth-refreshing morn
The pure white clouds are born,—
The incense of the ground sent up to Him.

NO slighted task is there,
But equal craft and care
And love in irresistible accord,
The test and sign of art,
Bestowed through every part;
No thought of recognition or reward.

IN that diviner air
We shall grow wise and fair,
Not frayed by hurry nor distraught by noise,—
Learn once again to be
Noble, courageous, free,—
Regain our primal ecstasy and poise.

CALM in the deep control
Of firmamental soul,
Let us abide unfretful and secure,
Knowledge and reason bent
To further soul's intent,—
Her veiled dim purposes remote yet sure.

FOR she has led us now,
Science unravels how,
Through cell and tissue up from dust to man;
And will lead bye and bye,
No logic tells us why,
To fill her purport in the ampler plan.

AH, trust the soul, my friends,
To seek her own great ends
Revealed not in the fashion of the hour!
For she outlives intact
The insufficient act,
Herself the source and channel of all power.

THE soul survives, unmarred,
The mind care-worn and scarred
That still is anxious over little things,
To come unto her own,
Through benefits unknown,
And the green beauty of a thousand springs.

FROM infinite resource
She holds her gleaming course
Through toil, distraction, hindrance, and dismay,
Till some high destiny,
Accomplished bye and bye,
Reveals the splendid hope that was her stay.

THEREFORE should every hour
Replenish her with power
Of joy and love and freedom and fresh truth,
That we even in age
May share her heritage
Of ancient wisdom with the heart of youth.

LORE of the worldly wise
Is folly in her eyes. [illegible]
All-energy, all-knowledge and all-love,
Aware of deeps below
This pageant that we know,
Hers is the very faith accounted of

BY Him who rose and bade
His friends be not afraid,
When peril rocked their fishing-boat at sea,—
Who bade the sick not fear,
The sad be of good cheer,
And in the hour they were made whole and free.

THE sceptic sees but part
Of Nature's mighty heart.
A wide berth would I give that dangerous shoal,—
Steer for the open sea,
No sight of land, but free.
Trusting my senses, shall I doubt my soul?

LET me each day anew
My outward voyage pursue
For the Far Islands and the Apple Lands;
Till through the breaking gloom
Some evening they shall loom,
With one pale star above the lilac sands.

AH, that day I shall know
How the shy wood-flowers grow,
In the deep forest, turning to the light;
Untrammelled impulse still
With glad obedient will
The only guide out of ancestral night.

OH, I shall comprehend
Truth at my journey's end,—
What being is and what I strive to be,—
What soul in beauty's guise
Eludes our wistful eyes,
Yet surely is akin to you and me.

THEREFORE, towards that supreme
Knowledge, that unveiled dream,
That promise of our life from day to day,
The grace of joyousness
Abide with us to bless
And help us forth along the Perfect Way!

THE voice of the good priest
In benediction ceased;
The congregation like a murmur rose;
And when I set my pack
Once more upon my back,
'Twas light as any thistle-down that blows.

OF THIS EDITION OF BLISS CARMAN'S "THE WORD AT ST. KAVIN'S" THREE HUNDRED COPIES HAVE BEEN PRINTED ON ALTON HAND-MADE PAPER, OF WHICH TWO HUNDRED AND FIFTY ONLY ARE FOR SALE. THE ORNAMENTS AND PLAN OF THE BOOK ARE THE WORK OF THOMAS MAITLAND CLELAND, AND THE PRESSWORK HAS BEEN EXECUTED AT THE HEINTZEMANN PRESS, BOSTON, MASS.
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